

# *The Newsletter*

*Saugatuck United Methodist Church*

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## STATE OF THE CHURCH (Presented at our 2019 Church Conference)

One of the first rules of driving a car relates to three primary colors: Green, Yellow, and Red. Under most circumstances Green means it's safe to move forward. Yellow means, exercise caution there is the possibility of danger ahead. And Red of course means "stop" and evaluate what's happening before you move ahead.

I want to use those colors to describe what I understand to be the state of the Saugatuck Church. Everywhere I have served at one time or another people have asked me "How are things at the church?" Often I would joke a little and say, "I am usually the last person to know." But in truth most of the time I had a pretty good idea of "the state of the church." There were three criteria I used to gauge the health of the churches I served: Attendance, Giving, and what's happening in the choir. You might use some other group besides the choir as an indicator. But ordinarily those three areas are good indicators. So after all these years let me use those three bench marks. I will describe each from my point of view and give you a chance to assign a color and then tell you my color.

**First attendance:** For the past two years our attendance has hovered around an average of 22 person worship service. When I became your pastor the number was between 35 and 40. Over the past 8 years we have had members move away, some have joined the church triumphant in heaven. A small number have transferred to other churches. And for some their health and physical condition has made it difficult to be in worship. Yes we have added members and regular attenders. And those who attend are faithful and committed. Yet our attendance has not kept pace with our shrinking numbers. What color would you give? (Yellow).

**Second Giving:** This is an area that this congregation has an excellent track record. For the past 8 years and longer we have paid our ministry shares/apportionments 100 %. We have paid all of our local expenses and maintained our building and property. We have supported local projects as well as district and conference special offerings. Our people have been generous and giving often beyond what was asked. Our stewardship efforts have been low key but our members give because they believe in this church and it's ministry. What color would you give? (Green)

**Third:** What in the past I would call the choir. Here at Saugatuck we have no choir, the congregation is our choir. And most Sundays they do an excellent job. So here I would chose the adult Sunday School class, or the women's Lunch Bunch or the group that gets together for lunch after church. The dynamics of these groups are a kin to the New Testament fellowship, Koinonia. At its best these groups meet genuine needs in people's lives, the need to be accepted, loved, and nurtured in the faith. The truth be known we all need this. Someone once said, "Christianity is as much caught as taught. Perhaps this is the greatest gift after Christ that we can offer people outside the church? What color would you give? (Green)

If you're driving and you see a green light, you continue. If you see a yellow light you continue and make adjustments. If red, you stop; do what needs to be done before you continue. My counsel is to take note of yellow lights.

There are really only two ways to increase attendance: those who already attend to attend more and for new people to attend. Perhaps a strategy to improve attendance numbers would be the most important goal for us in the coming year.

With appreciation,  
Pastor Emmett